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RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 002219

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM KDEM GG RU

SUBJECT: GEORGIA: FORMER SAAKASHVILI ALLY ACCUSES TBILISI
OF PLANNING AUGUST EVENTS; GOVERNMENT QUICKLY REBUTS

REF: TBILISI 2016

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN F. TEFTT FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) AND (d).

¶1. (C) Summary and Comment. In a November 25 appearance before the Parliamentary Commission Investigating the August Conflict, former Georgian Ambassador to Russia Erosi Kitsmarishvili publicly stated his views that Georgia's leaders wanted conflict with Russia and that the United States gave the Georgians a "green light" to take military action. In statements on November 26, Kitsmarishvili claimed that the President of the United States and the Secretary of State gave Saakashvili implicit permission to use military force. Immediately following Kitsmarishvili's testimony, Deputy FM Giga Bokeria testified that Georgia had not sought conflict and refuted Kitsmarishvili's testimony. The Commission's meeting garnered significant public attention as one of the Commissioners walked out. The Georgian public is anxiously awaiting the testimony of President Saakashvili on November 28. Commission Chairman Paata Davitaia has worked to ensure that the commission thoroughly reviews a range of views regarding the August events and the heated exchanges on November 25 are evidence that the Commission is listening to those whose views differ significantly from those of the President. End Summary and Comment.

FORMER AMBASSADOR TAKES AIM AT THE PRESIDENT

¶2. (C) Erosi Kitsmarishvili testified before the Parliamentary Commission Investigating the August Conflict on November 25. (Note: Kitsmarishvili was sent to Moscow as Georgia's Ambassador but never actually presented his credentials to the Kremlin. He spent approximately two months in Moscow, from April until July. End note) In his three hour appearance, he argued several points (a fuller transcript is available on www.civil.ge):

-- Georgia's leadership had purposefully dismissed opportunities to create new channels of communication with Moscow;

-- Saakashvili was committed to a war plan as early as spring 2008;

-- U.S. officials gave Saakashvili a green light to resolve the conflicts militarily.

¶3. (C) In contrast with previous testimony, tempers flared throughout the session. Commission Chairman Paata Davitaia (see reftel) pushed Kitsmarishvili to say exactly who in the USG had given permission to the Georgian government. Kitsmarishvili was unable to provide a name and stated for the record that he had a conversation with Ambassador Tefft in which Ambassador Tefft said unequivocally that military action was unacceptable and that the USG had not given anyone a "green light" for military action. (Note: The Ambassador does not remember a meeting with Kitsmarishvili and the embassy has no record of such a meeting. End note.) At one point, Kitsmarishvili reportedly called Commission member

Givi Targamadze a scoundrel. Targamadze walked out, although he later returned and apologized for his reaction. The hearing ended when Kitsmarishvili walked out.

BOKERIA RESPONDS FOR THE GOVERNMENT

¶4. (C) As a result of Kitsmarishvili's accusations, the commission called the Foreign Minister to Parliament to answer the allegations. As the Foreign Minister was outside the country, Deputy Foreign Minister Giga Bokeria represented the government. Bokeria dismissed the allegation that the Georgian leadership had neglected opportunities to normalize ties with Moscow. Bokeria stated that Kitsmarishvili's accusation that Saakashvili and his team wanted war was "absurd and a lie." Bokeria believed that Kitsmarishvili was attacking the President because he had lost his Ambassadorial position after being recalled in July. Bokeria also said that Kitsmarishvili's appointment as Ambassador to Moscow was a serious mistake.

¶5. (C) In a separate conversation, former Deputy Foreign Minister and current Minister of Culture Grigol Vashadze told the Ambassador that Kitsmarishvili had not been a part of the President's inner circle as tensions with Russia heated throughout the summer of 2008. He was not in a position to know what was being said between Washington and Tbilisi or Tbilisi and Moscow at the highest levels and therefore was clearly guessing at the events of the summer. According to Vashadze, Kitsmarishvili had been disappointed when he was officially recalled in July.

¶6. (C) The day following his testimony (November 26)

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Kitsmarishvili clarified to the press that the "green light" to Georgian authorities from the USG had come directly from President Bush. (Note: Post has used Department press guidance to publicly deny this allegation. End Note).

THE WORK OF THE COMMISSION CONTINUES

¶7. (C) On November 27, Minister of the Interior Vano Merabishvili and Minister of Defense Kezerashvili also testified regarding the capabilities and failures of Georgia's police and armed forces in early August. Kezerashvili personally claimed responsibility for the failure of the reserve troops. Merabishvili provided a power point presentation with a timeline of events.

¶8. (C) On November 28, President Saakashvili is scheduled to testify late in the afternoon Tbilisi time. Saakashvili has volunteered to appear before the commission, and the Parliament has invited the diplomatic corps to attend. Post will report on his testimony septel. Chairman of the Commission Paata Davitaia told Poloff that he expected the Commission to issue its findings in early December, although some observers and members of Parliament believe the Commission should hear additional testimony. Davitaia has shown his commitment to leading a thorough process seeking answers to difficult questions while being fair to those who continue to appear. Many Embassy interlocutors have told us that the hearings are being watched closely by the public, which is, for the first time in recent memory, watching its government be held accountable for its actions.

TEFFT